



## Book Review

**David Rodríguez Goyes, Hanneke Mol, Avi Brisman and Nigel South (eds) (2017) *Environmental Crime in Latin America: The Theft of Nature and the Poisoning of the Land*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.**

**Maja Bjørken Hol**

University of Oslo, Norway

In the last three decades, scholars have increasingly turned their attention to power aspects of natural and environmental destruction. As the growing field of research under the label of green criminology suggests, analyses of power relations of both material and discursive nature may provide a better understanding of how and why environmental crime and destruction occur. Until now, however, the bulk of the scholarship has focused on the Global North. Our understanding, and thus, our theoretical framework, has been shaped by this simple fact since the inception of the discipline. By dedicating a volume to a regional context of the Global South and outside the Anglo-American linguistic sphere, the editors of *Environmental Crime in Latin America: The Theft of Nature and the Poisoning of the Land* hope to broaden green criminology into a truly global discipline. Through the three different parts of the volume, the contributors explore how both people, non-human animals and the environment itself is affected by human exercise of power. Although the editors—Avi Brisman, David Rodríguez Goyes, Hanneke Mol and Nigel South—in the introductory chapter suggest that an actor-based approach is the basis of the volume (p. 2), many of the contributors combine examination of actors' roles with in-depth analyses of hegemonic systems of production, in which power structures of both past and present are often vital to the understanding of the cases.

The structural approach is perhaps most visible in the first part of the book, which contains four chapters discussing how historical-political structures in Latin America shape conflict and injustice of the present. In Chapter 2, Cleotilde Hernández Suárez uses the case of wastewater management in Hidalgo, Mexico to demonstrate how capitalist notions of private ownership of a public good harm the environment. Hernández illustrates how the government avoids the responsibility of preserving public goods by attempting to criminalise farmers who irrigate with wastewater, and by making farmers liable for the damages this causes. A similar lens is used by Eduardo Mondaca, who describes how the Chilean government permitted the exploitation of the archipelago of Chiloé's natural and social resources, with little regard for the inhabitants and their rights (Chapter 3). In line with the neoliberal economic model, the archipelago was transformed into what Mondaca calls an 'internal colony', a site of production and exploitation previously untapped. Among other things, Mondaca uses evidence from the salmon industry, land-grabbing

for luxury tourism and mining concessions to exemplify how the influence of the neoliberal economic model in Chile has affected the environment.

Gustavo Rojas-Páez explores the effect of another kind of extractivism, that of the Colombian mega-mining project Cerrejón (Chapter 4). Rojas-Páez identifies another historical conflict, that of persisting structural injustices in the colonial world. Through the concepts of 'crimes of the powerful' and 'state-organized crime', he analyses the Indigenous group Wayuu and their resistance against the mining project, and their struggle for recognition as a historically marginalised group in two different legal bodies. In the final chapter of the first section, the focus is again on neoliberal policies and practices in the mining business in Colombia. Laura Gutiérrez-Gómez explores the promotion of foreign direct investments, which the country prioritises through implementing regulations and development plans and argues that the mining industry and its damages in Colombia is not solely a result of the neoliberal policies (Chapter 5). Rather, it needs to be analysed in the historical context of armed conflicts, institutions characterised by corruption and the weakness of the Colombian state, all factors that deepen the gap and distort an already-skewed power balance between corporate giants and vulnerable populations. This last effect is the main common denominator of all four chapters; the power relations of environmental destruction is intimately tied to both 'new' and 'old' systems of order, which differ substantially from those of the Global North.

The second part of the book, 'The Takeover of Land and the Plundering of its Products', turns attention towards legal frameworks and the conflicts between official and alternative discourses concerning nature and environment. Matthew G. Yeager and Jade L. Smith's contribution is a case study of a class action tort claim against Chevron, one of the largest multinational oil companies in the world (Chapter 6). The plaintiffs were Indigenous communities in Ecuador, who suffered from the pollution and destruction caused by the corporation's activity and its ignorance of environmental regulations. This case demonstrates how difficult it is for marginalised groups to prevail in the judicial system, even though the ruling is in their favour. A similar finding, albeit more heartening, can be extrapolated from Ana Mariel Weinstock's analysis of how socio-environmental movements in Esquel (in the Patagonian province of Chubut, Argentina) prevented transnational corporation Meridian Gold from extracting gold and silver in the El Desquite mine (Chapter 7). The movement acted both inside and outside the judicial system. However, the most important efforts of the movement were not on judicial and institutional arenas, but on alternative social arenas, such as protests in the streets, petitions and polls, including more creative forms such as theatre plays and playing the national anthem during official ceremonies while turning their backs to the governor. Weinstock argues that embracing 'alternative' eco-philosophies and detaching oneself from the imposed Western legal system is more effective to resist environmental harms than using orthodox legal tools.

The section also highlights how execution of power takes different forms in different contexts. In Chapter 8, Hanneke Mol explores the practices and mechanisms of transforming Afro-Colombian and Indigenous land for palm oil production in the southern part of the Colombian Pacific coast. Based on fieldwork in Nariño, Mol describes how power in the palm oil industry, contrary to common perceptions, is not necessarily exercised through means of coercion and direct imposition, but also through persuasion and compromise. Chapter 9, by David Rodríguez Goyes and Nigel South, examines how privatisation of natural diversity in Latin America is supported and enforced by policing and law, so that profit can be made. Using the example of biopiracy, which is the process of privatisation and patenting of seeds to monopolise them, the authors discuss how implementations of international agreements criminalises peasants, Indigenous people and Afro-descendants and their farming traditions. The authors also argue that there is a blurred line between the public and private forces, as police are linked to private interests such as security companies and paramilitary groups.

The third, and last, part of the book concerns itself with wildlife trafficking, species justice and animal rights. In Chapter 10, Ragnhild Sollund discusses the legal and illegal trafficking of non-human animals, the dynamics of the trade and the efforts made to control it on a global level. Through interviews, Sollund finds that most animals seized by Colombian authorities are meant to be pets, and that this practice has deep cultural–historical roots in Colombia. Sollund emphasises the suffering these animals have to endure and argues—with the concepts of animal rights and species justice—that both the legal and illegal trade constitute breaches of animal welfare legislation, if this were to be taken seriously. In Chapter 11, Marcelo Robis Francisco Nassaro examines wildlife trafficking in the state of São Paulo in Brazil, and why efforts to stop it have failed. He describes the chain of wildlife trafficking in Brazil, which begins with the hunting of wild animals: various bird species, iguanas, monkeys and turtles, among others. Most of the animals wind up as pets in São Paulo. Nassaro addresses various factors that affect efforts to stop wildlife trafficking. When the animals are seized by the authorities, they should be returned to their habitat or to centres for treatment and rehabilitation if they are injured or in need of care. Due to the fact that the authorities recover more animals than the centres are able to receive, and the need for habitat monitoring, law enforcement officers often have to delay planned operations until space is available. Lack of exchange of intelligence between the states also makes it difficult to stop the trafficking, combined with the sense of impunity of both trafficker and customer.

Finally, Ángela María Maldonado and Thomas Lafon describe in Chapter 12 how the FIDIC (Fundación Instituto de Inmunología de Colombia) has researched a malaria vaccine for the past 40 years, and how the use of night monkeys in these experiments has damaged the environment and harmed individual monkeys. Despite the lack of results and scientific credibility, the institute has continued to take a number of monkeys higher than their issued permit allows them to. This has been allowed and supported by environmental authorities through permits and funding. The damages of this research include: deforestation caused by trapping methods where the loss is approximately 65,000 trees annually, imbalance in the ecosystem caused by release of monkeys in areas they originally do not live, resulting in local extinction of other monkey species, and suffering of the individuals. In 2011, one of the authors of this chapter filed a lawsuit against FIDIC and two environmental authorities in Colombia. This lawsuit addressed the lack of responsibility and the corruption of environmental authorities.

It is not an easy task to summarise the main take of a volume in which such a wide variety of theoretical perspectives and cases is included. Its greatest strength is perhaps its diversity, both in terms of contexts, objects of study and theoretical approaches. Many well-known issues in criminology, such as impunity, privatisation and legal mobilisation, are conceptualised and discussed in innovative ways, making the volume relevant for readers outside the subdiscipline's reach. Further, the contributors are able to synthesise complex matter and intricate systems of power in an understandable manner. The editors have also tried to include cases in which the agency of both Indigenous and other subaltern groups is treated in depth, and, through this, revealed a huge potential for transnational learning in Latin America, both for academics and activists. It is still worth noting that the cases in the volume are limited to parts of Latin America. Central America and the Caribbean do not feature in the volume, adding to the notion that Latin America has a knowledge gap that needs addressing.

Despite the diversity, one message is deeply rooted in all texts. Green criminology as a critical discipline should concern itself with different aspects of power: human power over nature, elite power over historically subordinate groups—both human and non-human—power over financial resources and power over politics. Recognising this also implies going to the root of the societal orders that maintain these power relations. Many of the contributors trace the relations that make environmental, human and non-human destruction possible to these orders, be it colonialism, neoliberalism or other systems of economic production. The volume would perhaps have benefited from a deeper initial discussion on these themes, and how they relate to the current political order. For instance, neoliberalism is a term that figures heavily in the volume,

often without being discussed in depth. More than a criticism of the volume, this final point should rather be read as a call for a greater integration of deeper political–ideological discussions in green criminology. Regarding this, the impressive gathering of findings and debates collected in *Environmental Crime in Latin America: The Theft of Nature and the Poisoning of the Land* enables a broader discussion on politics, development and nature in the Latin American context.

*Correspondence:* Maja Bjørken Hol, Department of Criminology and the Sociology of Law, University of Oslo, Problemveien 7, 0315 Oslo, Norway. Email: maja.hol@gmail.com.

*Please cite this book review as:*

Hol MB (2019) Review of *Environmental Crime in Latin America: The Theft of Nature and the Poisoning of the Land* by David Rodriguez, Hanneke Mol, Avi Brisman and Nigel South (eds). *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 8(3): 112-115. DOI: 10.5204/ijcjsd.v8i3.1248



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International Licence](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/). As an open access journal, articles are free to use with proper attribution. ISSN: 2202-8005